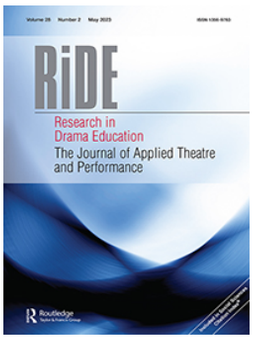

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Therapeutic aspects in the autobiographical/autoethnographic performance of three women addressing their experience of communal sleeping as children in the kibbutz

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ABSTRACT

Autobiographical theatre usually brings to the forefront personal experiences that have been hidden or silenced, while the autoethnographic approach emphasises their social dimensions. This article looks at *Night Watchers* (an autobiographical/autoethnographic piece) featuring three artists who, using acting, painting, and poetry, tell the story of their communal sleeping as children in the kibbutz, revealing its emotional sequels until today. Children's communal sleeping was customary in the kibbutz in Israel, from their establishment until the 1980s. The article takes this piece as a case-study to explore the potential of autobiographical/autoethnographic performance to achieve therapeutic transformation while also contemplating the social context.

KEYWORDS

Autobiographical performance; autoethnographic performance; therapeutic theatre; communal sleeping; kibbutz

Introduction

Night Watchers is an autobiographical/autoethnographic performance that explores the communal sleeping arrangement of kibbutz children through the personal narrative of three creators, each raised in a different kibbutz: Inbal Shibolet-Binsted (drama teacher and dramatherapist), Chen Rotem (singer, writer, and composer), and Sharon Rashbam-Prop (painter and writer). Their stories cover early childhood, adolescence, and current life. The opening scenes focus on the communal sleeping arrangement, depicting the creators' anxieties and sufferings from being separated from their parents, and introducing the role of the 'night watcher'. The part relating to their adolescence describes their first loves, their preoccupation with self-image, their relationships with their grandparents, and the disintegration of the home. The third part presents their reflections on mature love, establishing their own homes, and accepting the past and themselves.

This article refers primarily to the first part of the performance, which portrays the communal sleeping arrangement and its components. We explore the protagonists' process as they work on this theme for the performance, focusing on the transformative effects that it produces on them, and its potential therapeutic implications.

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The children's communal sleeping arrangement in the kibbutz

Infant and children's communal sleeping was customary in kibbutzim (Hebrew plural of kibbutz) in Israel, from their establishment until the late 1980s. The children were separated from their parents and slept in 'children's houses', with a night watcher overseeing them. Only in the afternoon or evening they visited their parents for a few hours.

Amia Lieblich (2010) reviews the unique phenomenon of the children's communal sleeping arrangement in the kibbutz, stating three reasons for its establishment. The first relates to physical and security concerns: the pioneers settled in remote sites for political purposes, so the communal setting aimed to protect the children and enhance their well-being. Seeing high infant mortality rates in the kibbutz's initial years, they gave 'professional carers' complete authority to tend to the children. The second motive was ideological: the collective education worldview held that removing children from home would liberate their mothers to work or engage in public activities, like their fathers. Moreover, the kibbutz embraced the idea of a utopian society, seeking to raise its children to lead a communal life. The third motive stemmed from scientific data and psychoanalytic theory: leading kibbutz intellectuals aspired to base the children's education on a rational and scientific system rather than the parental unit. Aligning with Freudian psychoanalysis, they considered the nuclear family to be a source of unsolvable conflictual relationships. Lieblich (2010) also notes that, by and large, the founding members had no connection with their own parents, since their immigration to Israel had severed the family ties. Consequently, 'the insecure young kibbutz mothers depended on, and adhered to, the authority of childcare professionals or other experts even when these recommended steps that contradicted their natural maternal feelings' (Lieblich 2010, 4–5).

The carer's role was central to the children's education. During the day, a permanent caregiver worked with them; however, at night, various 'night watchers' took turns to watch over the sleeping children. Sidi and Shafran (2020) describe the children's sleeping arrangement in these words:

> … picture a baby in her first year of life sleeping in a communal Kibbutz children's home, with many other infants, a distance away from her parents' home. In the middle of the night, the infant wakes up due to hunger or cold, and she finds herself alone. She becomes anxious and cries, but her mother or father does not come. At first, as no one responds to her cry, her anxiety intensifies, and her cries increase in volume. Only after about 10 min, a strange face and voice present themselves. The infant refuses to be comforted. Eventually, the crying wears the infant out. She eats a bit and falls asleep. This episode repeats itself almost every night during her infant years. (2)

Ainsworth's and Bowlby's (1991) attachment theory states that babies have a congenital need to bond with at least one central caregiver throughout their first years of life. This bond is vital to the baby's social and emotional development, impacting even their adult life and intimate relationships. Research about the communal sleeping arrangement at the kibbutz and attachment patterns has produced inconsistent findings (Sidi and Shafran 2020). However, Zehavi (2009) suggests that an attachment pattern can form between the child and their peer group – not only with the caregiver. Hence, a child's sense of emotional loneliness would be influenced by their connection with the caregiver, whereas their social loneliness would be affected by their relationships with their peer group. Zehavi's (2009) study thus supports the broadening of the 'attachment figure'

concept to 'attachment group', thus aligning with Bowlby's (1988) premise that the internal models created by the child are flexible and dynamic.

Lieblich (2010) states that about a quarter to a third of the children in her study had suffered in the communal sleeping arrangement and had accumulated unfinished emotional business. Apparently, the talented ones were urged to 'settle the score' with the past via artistic creations criticising their childhood (Palgi and Eliette 2009).

Autobiographical and autoethnographic performance

According to Heddon (2008), performing our life stories allows us to imagine ourselves differently and to choose scenarios that diverge from those that had previously trapped us. The autobiographical piece allows the author 'to speak the personally political in public', which is 'liberating and excruciating, but always, in some way, enabling' (Spry 2003 in Heddon 2008, 3).

Two significant features stand out when observing the stage-audience relations in an autobiographical performance. Firstly, the intimate encounter between the creator/performer and the audience. Jacques (2016) claims that in autobiographical pieces it would be impossible for creators to share their experiences without the physical presence of the 'other' (the audience), because the latter's attendance establishes the creator's visibility, not only as a performer, but also as a communicator of personal experiences, as a narrative identity. A special connection is forged between performer and spectator when content rooted in lived experience is presented, as the act of sharing this material encourages the creation of community, dialogue, and confrontation. In autobiographical performances, appearing in front of an audience may illuminate denied or marginal issues, or 'talk back', thus challenging and protesting representations or assumptions about those issues (Heddon 2008). Hence, most autobiographical theatre approaches aim to incorporate personal, social, and political contexts.

Both autobiographical and autoethnographic performance are self-referential forms. But while autobiographical pieces are generally concerned with personal life, autoethnographic forms relate more particularly to 'the actor's ethnicity, class, gender or social grouping' (Pendzik, Emunah, and Johnson 2016, 2). Borrowing an image from Augusto Boal's (1995) definition of Theatre of the Oppressed, autoethnographic performances stress the 'first person plural' (45), while autobiographical performances focus more on the first person singular. Autoethnographic theatre engages itself more relentlessly with the political and social aspects of the performers' lives, presenting questions such as, who is the speaker? What is spoken on stage? What sorts of lives are represented here? (Heddon 2008). Autoethnographic performance investigates 'forms of epistemology, performativity, performance as/and representation, performance as social behaviour, performance and/as experience' (Rowe 2017, 287). Spry (2016) defines autoethnographic theatre as a personal, political, and social praxis which provides 'a framework to critically reflect upon the ways in which our personal lives intersect, collide and commune with others in the body politic in ways alternate to hegemonic cultural expectations' (54). In her words, 'performing autoethnography has been a vehicle of emancipation from cultural and familial identity scripts that have structured my identity, personally and professionally' (Spry 2001, 708). Therefore, the autoethnographic narrative elicits questions about our global lives.

Autobiographical therapeutic performance (ATP)

Autobiographical therapeutic performance is a specific brand of dramatherapy that engages with personal experiences, bringing the process to a performance in front of an audience, in an attempt to achieve psychological awareness and therapeutic change (Pendzik 2021a). Inspired by the experimental theatre of the 60's and 70's of the twentieth century, the format integrates aspects related to culture, society, politics, race, and gender (Snow 2016).

Compared to autobiographical performance, this theatre aspires to create something new not only for the audience, but also for the performers themselves (Emunah 2015). In fact, in ATP, the creator/client stands at the centre of the process: they construct a performance using lived experience while focusing on themes or dilemmas that also concern their current life. Reneé Emunah's Self-Revelatory Performance approach (2015) suggests that self-revelation occurs when the creator 'works through' personal material that is 'in need of healing' (72). ATP addresses the topics that emerge as the creative, rehearsal, and production processes unfold, either by treating them as in a psychotherapeutic setting or by including them in the stage performance (Pendzik 2021b). Throughout this process, one finds that many of the 'technical difficulties' that need to be sorted out for the performance have emotional implications and psychological overtones. Rehearsals offer a creative way to address issues that seem to trap the creator in normal life (Pendzik 2013).

The role of the therapist/director is to develop the creators' trust, and encourage their sense of power, authenticity, and freedom of expression (Emunah 2016). Susana Pendzik (2021a) uses the 'midwife' metaphor to define the work of the therapist/director. Much like in childbirth, the creator undergoes a full range of emotions throughout the creative process, which can include confusion, grief, anger, and joy. As the person in charge of keeping the delivery going, the therapist/director is requested to hold space for these emotions. Like a midwife, s/he may help to deliver in various ways, from stagecraft manipulation to playing a role onstage; from reflecting and witnessing to challenging the creator. Although midwifes play a part in the birthing process, they are not genetically related to the product that is born into the world.

ATP aims to achieve healing and transformation. The first level of healing occurs when someone listens closely and empathetically, acting as a witness. A more tangible level evolves when the creator begins to express the material in an aesthetic form. An additional level takes place when the audience provides the creator with feedback as an 'observing witness' (Jacques 2016). Acceptance is the creator's award for their courage to unfold their personal story. 'The performer ultimately reaches for understanding, acceptance, validation, re-configuration, transformation, or mastery of the various parts of his/her psyche' (Emunah 2015, 75). A last phase occurs when the above-mentioned experiences are somehow reincorporated into the creator's daily life.

Project description

Night Watchers was first presented in 2019. The piece introduces the personal narratives of three creators, each raised in a different kibbutz, about their experience of the communal sleeping arrangement, focusing on early childhood, adolescence, and current life. Inbal

Shibolet-Binsted performs the theatrical parts; Chen Rotem, performs the show's songs. Sharon Rashbam-Prop recites excerpts from her book, while her paintings appear on a large screen at the back of the stage (2018).

Method

Our research explores the factors that support therapeutic transformation in the context of a creative process leading to an autobiographical/autoethnographic performance that was not formally seeking for, nor defined as, therapy. Our focus on 'therapeutic transformation' centres on the experience of the communal sleeping arrangement that was customary in kibbutzim, and its influence on the performers' lives.

Research Tools. The study is based on semi-structured interviews with the three creators, as well as on the analysis of the performance process and the texts. The data is analysed following the principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2012), which identifies and organises the units of meaning (themes) derived from the research, allowing researchers to assign meaning to a collective experience.

The interviews aimed to explore the potential therapeutic transformations emerging from the creation and performance of an autobiographical/autoethnographic piece, although therapy has not been its primary purpose. Nine questions were posed to the performers on their experience of the communal sleeping arrangement, the creation of the performance, the actual performances, and their reflections on the process from a perspective of time (Appendix). Interviews lasted about one hour and a half and were recorded with the interviewees' informed consent. They were transcribed and forwarded to them for approval.

Participants. The women who participated in *Night Watchers* were raised in kibbutzim and had experienced the communal sleeping arrangement as infants. They wrote texts about this, which they later selected and edited for the performance. Their ages ranged from 38 to 54 years old.

Ethical Aspects. The study was approved by the Tel-Hai College's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and told they were free to end their participation at any stage, without any consequences to their withdrawal. It was made clear to them that since the performance is public, their personal information is bound to be exposed.

Data Processing. We consolidated the themes relying on observation and the interviewees' transcripts, following Braun and Clarke (2012). The findings were coded, and the recurring themes mentioned in the interviews were sorted into categories. The analysis indicated that the creators referred to two principal axes: the experience of the communal sleeping arrangement, and the performance process. The themes that were found along the two axes are presented in the findings section.

Personal Biases. One of the researchers (Meira) is a community-based theatre director and a dramatherapist.

The creative process

The creative process of *Night Watchers* began way before the creators and the director had even met. All three creators asserted that they first addressed the communal sleeping

arrangement as adults, while pursuing higher education in creative arts. For Inbal, the issue arose during her dramatherapy training. Chen encountered it while studying music, whereas Sharon, when she was studying painting. Each one had explored the theme from a different starting point and had found a way of putting on a public performance on her own. Through a 'chance' meeting at a local theatre festival, the participants decided to join forces and put up a common performance around their experiences. This decision initiated a new phase in the process, and Meira was called in to accompany them as a community-based theatre director and process facilitator.

After discussing their expectations and wishes, the creators met at Sharon's house and presented their texts, paintings, and poems to each other. Their enthusiasm for sharing their work, and especially their delight in discovering texts conveying similar experiences, forged an immediate connection between them and encouraged them to continue their artistic journey together. The texts were given to Meira to shape a storyline for the performance, as is customary in some forms of community-based theatre (Lev-Aladgem 2010).

Meira's first draft gave each creator approximately equal stage time. She emphasised that it was not a final text, and that they could omit or add any texts as needed. The play includes excerpts from Sharon's book *Time had forgotten,* as well as her paintings, which served as the theatre set; texts that Inbal wrote and performed, and songs that Chen had written and composed.

The first show appeared at the Sheikh Abreik Festival – a community event produced and performed by local residents. From then on, the performance was commissioned to appear in several kibbutzim, and various venues in Tel Aviv, including the Jaffa Theatre – an Arab-Hebrew endeavour that promotes a creative partnership between cultures.

The rehearsals continued and developed creatively. As director and facilitator of the project, Meira noticed the protagonists' struggles and their vulnerability when addressing the intense childhood experiences of communal sleeping. In contrast to them, Meira was raised in the city, not the kibbutz. Furthermore, born to a Mizrahi (Oriental Jewish) family, the kibbutz for Meira was quite the opposite of her childhood experience. Like many of her peers, Meira had been exposed to the 'myths' of the kibbutz, a place that was perceived as 'better off', where children got a more thorough education, and where Jewish traditions were not followed. She was also aware that many Mizrahi youngsters that were 'sent off' to a kibbutz came back quite confused, mostly because the kibbutz failed to properly integrate them. Meira's empathy to the participants' material came from her experience as a Mizrahi child, having to stand on her own feet. Guided by a sense of respect and sensitivity towards the material, she tried to validate their experience and encourage trust. She did not see herself as a co-creator, neither in terms of the contents nor of the experience. Her role was to help 'give birth' to the product (Graham 2009; Pendzik 2013).

As the work continued and the creators rehearsed and performed the show in various places, the sense of closeness and intimacy deepened between them. They made joint decisions about the performance (both aesthetic and logistical) and set out a division of labour regarding its production and promotion. The performance became a collective 'baby' that connected them as a team, the individuals became a group.

The piece

It's night-time and blue lights flood the stage. The actresses' beds at the kibbutz children's house are represented with masking tape adhered to the floor (Picture 1). Inbal enters with a masking tape and outlines a bed in front of her cube. She then falls asleep and thus joins the communal sleeping onstage.

Screened backstage is Sharon's painting depicting a girl who has fallen asleep outside at night; a small cat is beside her (Picture 2). Sharon recites a poem describing the sounds of night in her childhood:

> A girl is immersed, immersed outside,
> She is part of everything,
> And quiet, quiet
> Surrendering to the sounds,
> The singing of insects
> The chirping of birds.
> An airplane gliding in the distance,
> A tractor rumbling …
> […]
> The sounds of her childhood.

Following, Inbal describes the night-time routine in the kindergarten (*Gan,* in Hebrew), as if 'imparting instructions' to the parents:

> Gan Hadas, good night; it is time to sleep. Parents must bring their children after dinner to the kibbutz' dining hall, bathe them, brush their teeth, have them go to the bathroom, and then, off to bed. […] Parents are allowed to sit near their children, at their bedside, and read them a bedtime story …

Picture 1. The Setting.

Picture 2. Lullaby.

8:30 pm all parents must leave the Gan.

Lights out.

This monologue is accompanied by the screening of Sharon's painting depicting kibbutz children in white undershirts and blue pants forming a line. They lack faces, and their identity appears to have been somewhat erased (Picture 3). Chen sings a song, begging her mother not to leave, and Inbal calls the Night Watcher in a particular tune that she remembers from her childhood. She adds:

> I will call mommy. Today is my day with her. But it's already night-time, so it's daddy's day. I will call daddy. … Daddy, please get me; I'm scared. Are you coming, daddy? It's taking daddy a long time to come. I'm running away from the Gan (runs off the stage).

Picture 4, depicting a girl surrounded by owls, bats, and other nocturnal creatures, accompanies Inbal's escape. In the following song, *Night Watcher*, Chen-as-a-child calls out to the night watcher, who never comes:

Night Watcher, come to me

Picture 3. Night Animals.

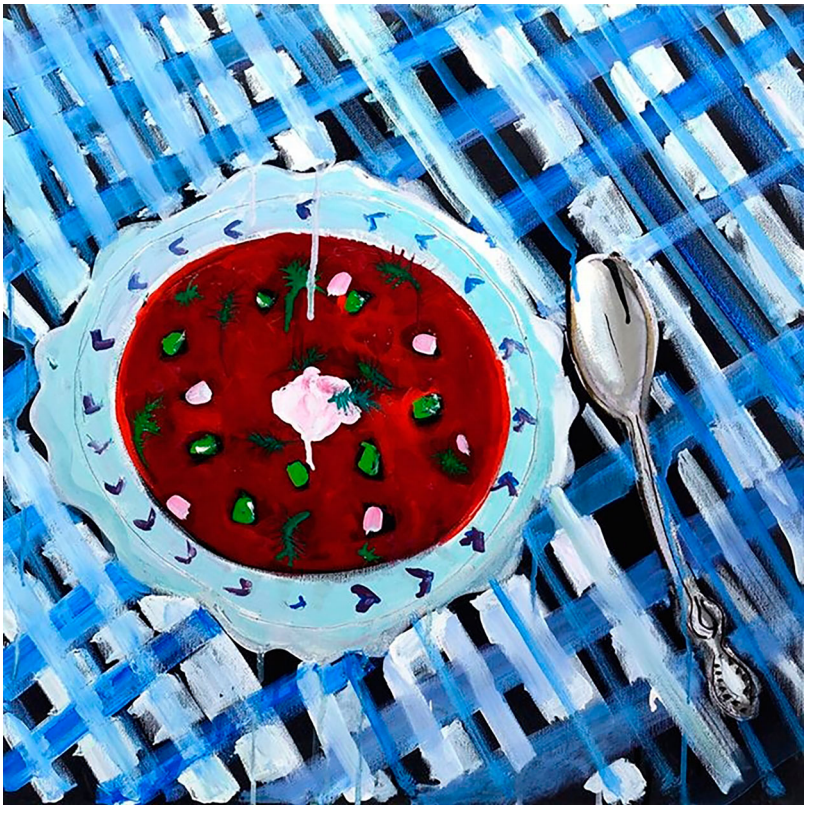
Picture 4. Oak Class.

To the children's house near the pine trees,
My Gan is the one that does not sleep
And, as the songs say, it is unlocked
It's still wide open for all to see …

A twist to this storyline is the creators' relationship with their grandparents. In one of the scenes, Sharon describes her afternoon visits to her grandparents' house and the consolation these visits gave her. Later, Chen sings with her grandfather (whose singing she had recorded several years ago). The three protagonists share a private moment with their grandparents. The scene is accompanied by Sharon's painting depicting the red borscht soup her grandmother used to cook for her (Picture 5).

As the piece continues, late puberty scenes about love and complex relationships are exposed. The third and last part refers to the present, showing a place of completion. Sharon reads a letter to the little girl from the kibbutz she had been, and Chen closes the show singing together with Inbal and Sharon, a classic, sad, Israeli song in which a woman is called to return home and return to herself.

In the discussion that ends each show, the audience reflects on the performance, sharing thoughts, emotions, and questions about the creators' encounter, the creative process, the communal sleeping experience, and its impact on their present lives. This discussion is an organic part of the show.



Picture 5. Borscht Soup.

Findings

The findings derive from the interviews with the creators and have been organised along two central axes of meaning: the experience axis, vis-à-vis of the communal sleeping arrangement, and the performance axis, relating to the creative process, the piece, and the performance as a theatrical event.

The experience axis

The experience axis illustrates the communal sleeping arrangement in the children's house as a complex experience with implications that continue to unfold over time. The experience encompasses a sense of aloneness, powerlessness, and an inability to trust others. These feelings were amplified because the night watchers interchanged frequently. The interview analysis suggests shared core themes: aloneness, the individual versus the group, the night watcher, and attachment patterns.

Aloneness: The communal sleeping arrangement caused the creators to feel lonely from a very young age. Chen describes the commotion as night-time approached: getting the children ready for bed, putting on pyjamas, brushing teeth, and the ruckus of the children – all this standing in stark contrast with the silence of being left behind: 'Utter darkness. You feel all alone in the world … '.

The sense of aloneness is conveyed in the creators' memory of weeping bitterly every night and receiving no response: 'What is the most powerful thing a child can do other than cry themselves to death?' This feeling caused Inbal to stretch out her 'goodnights' to make her parents stay with her. Inbal and Sharon used to run away from the children's house to reunite with their parents. This feeling has stayed imprinted in their emotional memories, constituting almost part of their identities:

> I feel that that girl who stands and calls the night watcher is always alive in me. I can see that barefoot child standing on the cold floor, waiting for someone to come.

> As far as I'm concerned, whenever you mention 'communal sleeping', it is me, standing alone and calling out to the night watcher.

> The communal sleeping arrangement caused me to trust no one. It is not a sickness you can get over in two weeks. It's a chronic condition.

The Individual Versus the Group: The 'children's group' comprised the peers who were raised in the communal sleeping arrangement. Each age group was given a name; and they ate, played, studied, and slumbered together throughout their childhood and adolescence. It appears that, as young girls, the creators felt vulnerable in their peer group:

> (The children) did nothing to you. They just fell asleep, and you did not, and [therefore] you were different from everyone, which makes you an outsider who cannot belong …

Furthermore, the creators report having 'roles' within their groups, which they coined as 'the girl who is very afraid of hurting others but needs to be seen;' 'the girl who does not belong;' and 'the girl whose affairs are decided upon by foreign considerations'.

The Night Watcher: This term was used in kibbutzim to describe the woman whose role is to take care of the children at night. Children's houses had an intercom through

which the children could call the night watchers. In the creators' experience, the night watchers appear as simultaneously present and absent figures.

> I'd wake up at night, usually crying and standing in front of the intercom, calling the night watcher; other children would wake up and cry, and she'd never come.
>
> Weeping and calling, calling and weeping, and nobody comes because no one is listening …

Attachment Patterns: Placed in the children's houses since they were three months old, the children were tended to by several carers and had no permanent figure who looked after them. Chen states that she understood she had no one, not even her parents, from a very tender age. Part of her pain in separating from her mother stemmed from not knowing which night watcher would come at night. In Sharon's words:

> Each night, we would untie the family ties, leaving loose ends, as if they were the strings of a human being, completely disconnected from any person or place. For what is a connection? A connection is a form of commitment. Once you realise that commitment ceases to exist from 8:30 pm to 4:00 pm the following day, you understand that if someone comes to you, it's because they heard you. It's all based on hearing, not a specific connection to you. So, you trust no one.

The experience axis depicts the communal sleeping arrangement as an intricate experience, involving a sense of aloneness, helplessness, and having no one to trust. These feelings may have resulted in an insecure attachment pattern that increased and reinforced the creators' anxiety. It seems that as young girls, the creators had experienced their roles as complex and vulnerable, even within their peer group.

The performance axis

The performance axis was experienced by the creators as a reworking of the original experience. The same themes that appeared in the experience axis (aloneness, individual versus group, attachment patterns, and the night watchers), clearly recur in the performance axis, both as contents in the piece and throughout the process. However, it is noteworthy that this axis introduces additional and reparative alternatives to the themes.

The interweaving of the themes in the process and in the piece intimately affected each other; therefore, they are presented together. The performance as an event is analysed on its own, as it elicits additional themes.

The creative process and the piece

Aloneness: The children's house scenes have a clear division of the dramatic space that allows each creator to tell the story from her perspective. Stagewise, the division of the space into three beds, marked out with masking-tape infuses a sense of tension, aloneness, and fear, which resonates with the creators' description of their childhood experience. As one of them mentioned:

> We could have been in the very same room, group, and kibbutz. That's how similar our experiences were.

As the creators' experiences were so akin, after the first show, Meira suggested to interconnect the texts in order to create a few shared scenes. However, such attempts were

met with intense opposition. Particularly in the scenes related to the communal sleeping, it became evident that the participants wanted to keep a clear-cut division, which was partly maintained by the artistic medium that each one chose: Inbal played the dramatic parts, Chen sang, and Sharon read from her book as her paintings were being screened at the back of the stage.

> … We are giving ourselves an experience … in which you … [the director] should allow each of us to have our spot. And that makes me feel safe in the experience.

> … It is very fitting that we come from drastically different disciplines: drama, painting, and music; they do not clash, and no one will enter someone else's lane.

> It became clear very quickly that there is music, text, painting, and drama, and that each one has her own space, her own 'role' which is extremely important in the kibbutz life: the one who dances beautifully has to be in the front; the tall one has to be in the back, so she doesn't block anyone out; the girl whose parents prepared the dance piece has to be in the front. Quite a few irrelevant considerations.

In other words, in the communal sleeping scenes, each creator preferred to stay in her territory, as this familiar experience provided a sense of safety. In fact, in the first few shows, Chen was accompanied by a piano player who sat on the side of the stage. But as the process advanced, she realised that she must be on the stage alone, as she had been in the children's house: 'It is only me here, like when I stood alone and called the night watcher. No one is with me.'

The masking tape (a central prop in the performance), shifts shapes, changes, develops, and recreates additional items that had been part of the communal sleeping arrangement, like the intercom that Inbal uses to call the night watcher. It symbolises the transitional object that Inbal had held in her hands at night when she felt fearful and tense:

> The masking tape comforts me in the absence of my mother at night. In a place where everything must be shared, … [it] is the only thing that belongs to me. I must hide it, so no one takes it from me.

The Individual Versus the Group: Sharon's painting called 'Oak class' (Picture 3) depicts a line of children standing in their underwear, with no faces and little individual traits (except for some hair style). As she pointed out in the interview:

> … having no faces is what stuck with me the most because when I'm in a group, I feel like I don't exist.

Many conflicts that arose in the rehearsals referred to each creator's sense of space and visibility within the group – thus recreating familiar issues from the past. Regarding her relationship with Inbal (whom she knew from childhood), Chen says:

> We had been very good friends [in childhood]; but people continuously made comparisons between us. So, when Inbal joined the performance (as she is also a singer), I was concerned where did each of us begin, and where did we end? And would we be able to really support each other?

Inbal adds:

> … there were many moments when I felt that the creative work was pulling us back to the old peer group and its role divisions … Frankly, I've felt this way the entire time.

As the group accumulated stage experience, a sense of belonging was generated that fostered healing ' … because healing takes place within relationships … '

> In the show … we are three women who create a collective … each one of us placed her memory next to the memory of her friend … and together, we created a collective of memories … and created a group.

As the group further solidified and began to address the themes of adolescence and the present day, there were more opportunities to interconnect and cooperate. In current shows, Inbal breaks the stage divisions by acting in the space between Sharon and Chen. In the grandparents' scene, the three actresses sit facing each other and reminisce about their grandparents' home. In addition, Sharon dedicates her closing words to Inbal and Chen, and they end up singing the closing song together (Picture 6).

Picture 6. Ending Scene.

The Night Watcher: Sharon embodies the Night Watcher as an absent and overbearing figure who attempts to dissipate the child's fears, while at the same time criticising her emotional 'exaggeration'. Addressing the theme of the night watcher in the performance, Chen states:

> It's not only me … Now I have the evidence we once did not have: Everyone woke up and cried and I never knew someone else was awake in the room. Suddenly, with this performance, we turned on the light in the room. And the entire room is calling out to the night watcher. That's the way I feel.

During the process, a nick name was given by the actresses to Meira, jokily calling her The Carer or the Night Watcher. Sometimes they refer to her profession as a dramatherapist; but they also meant that she resembles a 'reparative' night watcher in the children's house:

> Coming from a different background, you, of all people, gave us permission to address the matter and say that we underwent something awful, which helped us make amends …
>
> You need an outsider to peek inside for a second to see things from a different perspective. That gave us confidence.
>
> You are like a mother, our great Night Watcher. You hold the shadows that surface in the process. And that's very meaningful …

Attachment Patterns: Finding in Meira an alternative role model for the night watcher illustrates the sort of repairing or transformation that took place in the actresses' psyche, as they trusted the director to lead the process. Moreover, the creators began to experience new attachment patterns that sometimes diverged from those they associated with the communal sleeping arrangement.

> It allowed me to free myself from feeling that there was no one I could trust. This liberated me from the need to … rely only on myself … because I trusted … [Meira], which was very pleasant.
>
> I vividly felt that all three of us are handing the responsibility to you: 'Help us, make every decision, and tell us how it should go.'
>
> I enjoyed the process and the performance very much, knowing there is a director. Overall, I love having a responsible adult around me. This was entirely non-existent in my childhood.

In addition, an alternative attachment role surfaced during rehearsals when the creators realised that their grandparents had provided a place of pause and love in their childhood. They cooked for them, pampered, and nurtured them physically and emotionally.

> Sharon: The Borscht soup … is part of a series I made about … dishes my grandmother made when I used to visit. This was the most potent expression of love that I had ever known.
>
> Inbal: Our grandparents offered a sense of home and consolation for all three of us. A warm place that was safe to visit. We discussed their significance to us. I love this part because it provides a pause.
>
> Chen: My grandparent's house always smelled of baked goods. They accepted you for who you were; it was a place where you could rest and be yourself.

As the piece's contents were revised, a need was felt to provide space for the pleasant, soothing, childhood memories, which did exist. Consequently, texts by Inbal and Chen were added, describing their connection with their own grandparents.

The performance as a theatrical event

The communal sleeping arrangement theme contains sensitive issues, such as loss, abandonment, parental functioning, and responsibility. Presenting these onstage involves an authentic, personal, and vulnerable exposure, which requires an intimate encounter between performers and audience.

The stage–audience relations showed fundamental differences according to the venue in which the performance took place. In the smaller spaces, the audience sits near the creators and is part of the story. As one performer put it:

> The audience holds the story with me, and thus I am not alone.

The audience's physical proximity emphasises its role as validating witnesses:

> After each show, and especially after the audience's response, I feel even more strongly that the communal sleeping arrangement is essentially illogical. But at the same time, I don't feel like a victim … the performance validated my feelings.

Audiences can be roughly sorted into two categories. At the Jaffa Theatre the crowd is diverse – composed of kibbutz members, city-dwellers, artists, therapists, close friends, and others. This audience is more relaxed and willing to participate in the closing discussion, ask questions, and share:

> I didn't know it would blow up like this, with people giving us a standing ovation or crying. The intensity surprised me.

> … I knew we were doing something good, but I did not expect the audience's response, which was so powerful.

In contrast, when the show is performed at the kibbutzim, the audience consists mainly of kibbutz members who are personally familiar with the communal sleeping arrangement – including adults who had experienced it as children, former night watchers, and parents whose children slept in the children's houses. Hence, these particular shows are more compelling and potentially upsetting for both the audience and the creators – since the performance 'passes judgment' on the kibbutz's ways, exposing trauma that thus far has not been properly addressed. The kibbutz audience finds it challenging to participate in a public discussion and prefers to meet the creators in private at the end of the evening:

> One of the things the performance has done is to connect us with people who have … the same experience, who find themselves overwhelmed by past events and emotions. And when the show ends, they come to speak with you and share their feelings.

Two shows took place in Sharon's and Chen's respective kibbutzim, with the latter attended also by members of Inbal's kibbutz. The creators' excitement and tension reached new heights before these shows:

> It gave me closure … it felt good to be where I am now. […] I have always felt that I don't know how to belong. Here I was, an outsider, but people accepted me. They embraced me.

> For me to come [to my former kibbutz] and tell the people who grew up with me about my childhood … but they had no idea who I was – it was like coming and saying: now you will finally know me. I'm not ashamed that you will know who I am. I'm very proud and happy to be myself here. And that gave me closure.

To summarise, the performance axis includes the piece as it evolves from the creative process, and the theatrical event, presenting an artistically reconstructed view of the communal sleeping arrangement. At first the creators felt compelled to protect their respective territories, thus expressing, as well as preserving, the sense of aloneness experienced in the sleeping arrangement. Nonetheless, in the performance, their separateness became a shared experience: the three girls called the Night Watcher, and their collective aloneness established a group. The theme of the individual versus the group was reexperienced during the rehearsal process, just as it had appeared in many aspects of their childhood in the kibbutz. However, the performance axis forged an ensemble in which each member has her own voice. The theme of the Night Watcher appears in the performance axis in a divergent format than it did in the experience axis. Here the director is a 'night watcher of sorts;' but she now accompanies the creators and is fully present. The attachment patterns shifted from insecure to secure (Bowlby 1988), generating a sense that one can genuinely trust now. Likewise, the creative process allowed the actresses to recall a positive attachment experience – the grandparents – who had been a source of consolation and warmth in their childhood. Furthermore, the performer–audience relations validated the creators' experience, even when confronted by old and familiar 'ghosts', thus providing them with a sense of self-acceptance, visibility, and even closure.

Discussion and conclusions

Speaking about the potential of therapeutic theatre to endure beyond its original purpose, Shabari Rao, Waghmare, and Gopalakrishna (2021) argue that 'when psychological wellness is not situated only within the individual but also acknowledged' (164) in its social dimension, therapeutic theatre can evolve into a wider form of addressing mental health. They claim that flexibility, awareness of emergence, and a collaborative work that honours integrity, allowed a therapeutic piece on child sexual abuse to become relevant for audiences beyond individual therapy. In the current article, we journeyed the opposite direction by asking what are the components required for an autoethnographic/autobiographical performance to exercise a therapeutic effect on the performers?

The primary objective of *Night Watchers* was to confront and protest a childhood experience (Heddon 2008); yet the creators underwent profound psychological processes associated with therapeutic transformation. As opposed to the original experience in which they were utterly alone, when they return to the children's house in the show, they encounter an audience that sees and hears them. The theatrical-aesthetic elaboration offered an opportunity to shape and reshape the experience (Pendzik 2016), allowing the creators to deconstruct and reconstruct the communal sleeping arrangement in each show, repeatedly confronting the experience from a new angle. This seemed to facilitate 'working through' the experience with myriad emotions, thoughts, and conflicts, and to process it psychologically (Emunah 2015). As Inbal said in the interview: 'Being inside the story repeatedly is a healing process in itself.'

As mentioned above, the same themes that emerged in the experience axis re-emerged in the performance axis, recreating themselves in each layer of the performance in a spiral-like motion. This can be seen as an indication that the creators' perception of

the communal sleeping experience is undergoing a transformation and transitioning into something else. One such change can be observed in the introduction of recovered positive experiences, such as the grandparents' scene. In narrative therapy this is called a 'unique outcome' (White and Epston 1990) – an often-neglected fact or experience that seemingly contradicts the dominant narrative. The evocation of the grandparents constitutes this sort of 'exception to the rule'. In the midst of utter aloneness, memories, feelings of abandonment and neglect, all three performers ended up evoking a soothing memory of consolation, a good attachment experience. This change was prompted simultaneously by personal processes and performance considerations, as the creators felt that the show is 'laying heavy on their hearts', and expressed the need to introduce a brighter touch. This dramaturgical twist foreshadows the baptism of Meira as a 'trustable night watcher'. According to White and Epston (1990), an acceptable outcome of therapy 'would be the identification or generation of alternative stories that enable [a person] to perform new meanings' (15). In this sense, the reiteration of a repairing experience throughout many performances could generate enough unique outcomes to forge an alternative narrative (Pendzik 2021b).

A similar occurrence applies to the experience of sharing their aloneness onstage and becoming visible to an audience. The therapeutic transformation is evident in the creators' acceptance of encountering the audience as a unit, a group. The articulation of a shared autoethnographic story about the communal sleeping arrangement, provided a sense of belonging that was absent in the performers' past. This in turn created a therapeutic transformation at the community level. Furthermore, as the process progressed and the group became a secure vessel, the creators revisited their old peer group and individual roles, confronting and addressing these issues within the group setting, as done in ATP (Emunah 2016). One may suggest that the group became itself an 'attachment figure' (Zehavi 2009), thus countering the night watchers who were absent in the creators' childhood and the stigmatising peer group. The director's approach manifests another attachment figure, as she provided a safe space and forged a connection that is responsive to the needs of the creators and the piece.

The group's creation of a shared and public show departs from the traditional ATP, particularly from Self-Revelatory format (Emunah 2015), with its focus on a single autobiography. However, a collective performance that confronts the communal sleeping arrangement is the creators' response to the experience itself. While the communal sleeping arrangement took place in the shadows of the children's houses, spawning an experience of abandonment and loneliness, the public performance transpires under the bright lights of the stage, stimulating the highest level of cooperation within the group and offering healing not only for the creators but for the audience too.

The creators' experience of 'togetherness' or 'un-aloneness' is sealed in the post-performance discussion, in which the stage merges with the performance hall. Contrasting with their former sense of loneliness in the children's house, the creators' connection with the audience generates a shared community where the external acknowledgment of their experience reaches a peak through a dialogue featuring acceptance, compassion, and confrontation (Heddon 2008). This community validates the creators' experience echoing it at a social level, which fosters communal healing.

The sole act of exposing pain and trauma through performance does not necessarily offer a repairing emotional experience (Pendzik 2013). Therapeutic transformations are

possible in the context of the group's solid formation and the director's work. The interventional approach of the director, who is also a dramatherapist resonates with Thompson's (2015) notion on the 'aesthetics of caring for others'. Based on Bourriaud's (2002) ideas of 'relational aesthetics', Thompson defines the 'aesthetics of care' as 'a set of values realised in a relational process that emphasise engagements between individuals or groups over time' (2015, 437), and involve an awareness of interpersonal interactions at all levels of the creative process and product. These notions are conveyed by Meira in several ways. Firstly, in her careful editing of the text to recreate the communal sleeping arrangement, applying the 'midwife style' (Graham 2009; Pendzik 2013), that is, as a facilitator of processes rather than as a director; secondly, in the relational awareness and integration of the group dynamics into the creative process, for instance by ensuring that each creator expresses herself in her favourite medium. Thirdly, in her holding of the process and the product from both ends throughout her interventions, accompanied by a participatory practice that is sensitive to the needs of constantly revisiting and modifying the product.

Participating in this project helped the creators to process the experience, or as Chen concludes in the interview:

> The three of us create art; we are raising families, it's not the end of the world, and our injuries are not unfixable. It was very significant for me to understand that.

This research is based on subjective experiences – the interviews with the participants and their performance process. It communicates the perspective of three specific women. Although the similarity of their processes was shared by many people in the audience who took part in the discussions after the show, thousands of children had experienced the communal sleeping arrangement in kibbutzim, so there may be many voices that this research does not represent. In spite of the study's limitations, we believe that it can contribute to the body of knowledge as an illustration of how recreating a significant life experience can bring transformation and effect healing processes at personal, interpersonal, and social levels.

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Appendix. Questions for a semi-structured interview

Name:

Age:

Marital status:

Number of children you have:

Place of residence:

Occupation:

1. Please share your experiences as a child about the communal sleeping arrangement in the kibbutz.
2. Please share how your creative process regarding the communal sleeping arrangement (writing/painting/drama) began.
3. Please describe the process of creating *Night Watchers*.
4. How do you feel about the product (the piece)?
5. Tell me about your experience of the first show of *Night Watchers* (How did the performance make you feel and think?)
6. Describe the differences (if there were any) between the first and the subsequent shows onstage.
7. Was the performance's text modified throughout the shows? What do you feel that these modifications reflect about your own process?
8. How did the performance influence feelings, thoughts, and perceptions about the communal sleeping arrangement?
9. Is there anything you would like to add?